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their relation steadily before his mind. Hence an incompatibility—which will be felt even by the reader who cannot formulate it—between the constructive effort of the work and the overweening frankness of the writer's negative statements. He insists so relentlessly on the banishment of supernaturalism and all its works, that his retention of the terms of supernaturalism—particularly his somewhat curious anxiety to retain its vocabulary in full—carries with it an unavoidable air of whimsicality. The same applies to his statements about agency. He declares roundly that no author of human deeds can be admitted except one that inhabits a human body and is a subject of human rights. Yet the whole spirit of his book betrays a consciousness, keen almost as Wordsworth's, of the presence of agency in the universe far beyond what ever was or will be focused in the heart of any mere man. His scientific horror of the supernatural makes him deny to it any shred of truth whatever, and obscures to him the all-important fact that even supernaturalism *misrepresents something*—and something important, namely, the transcendent aspect of spirit. It is his failure to lay hold of this essence of supernaturalism and carry it forward that we think the weak point of his book. Yet, if the distinction be permissible, the inadequacy lies only in the philosophic unsteadiness of the author's thinking, not in the fundamental nature of his case. It is well, in a book like his, to err by sounding the negative note too loudly. This is what divides his work from the feeble compromises of the past and places it in a new category. It is impossible not to believe that his ideal of an enlightened religion which has finally come to terms with the scientific consciousness is in tune with the most characteristic trend of our national life, and also that it is rendered less of a dream and is brought nearer the region of sane prophecy by this plain, strong presentment of it.

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THE HISTORY OF FREEDOM, AND OTHER ESSAYS. Pp. xxxix, 630.
HISTORICAL STUDIES AND ESSAYS. Pp. 544. By the first Lord Acton. Edited by J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence. Two Vols. London and New York: Macmillan & Co., Ltd.

The essays collected in these volumes, though dealing for the most part with historical problems and incidents, are not without

their special interest for readers of the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS. Acton had projected a work on the history of liberty, for which, as it seems, some of these pieces were the rough material, and a survey of the fragments makes it clear enough why the work was never completed. No doubt its plan was too vast; but no one can look into Acton's writings without feeling that, from the nature of the case, his views on political philosophy were scarcely susceptible of systematic exposition.

The two fundamental principles of his life were liberty and Catholicism. Absolutism in all its shapes he condemned in a spirit of moral austerity which gives a touch of the sublime even to his most crabbed page; and his devotion to his church was equally profound and passionate. But the union of these two principles does not seem naturally favorable to logical consistency, and Acton, in spite of the force and subtlety of his mind, had little power of, and little interest in theoretical analysis. This may be a merit in the historian, if it is the historian's sole business to state facts; but in the political philosopher it is a grave defect. Acton's theory (if it can be called a theory) may be stated somewhat as follows. Liberty is the highest political end. No definition of it can be given (in one place he says it is like the camel: it enjoys more definitions than any other natural object), but it may be known by various marks, such as the free action of the church, the security of minorities, the paramount reign of law, the presence of different nations under the same sovereignty, the limitation of the authority of the state and the vindication of the rights of conscience. Or we might define it negatively as the opposite to absolutism in the state. Wherever the state is absolute (*e. g.*, France under Louis XIV, and the United States after the defeat of the South) there is guilt in the impartial eyes of history. Thus democracy is as fatal to liberty as is despotism; "the revolution," with its false doctrine of equality, involves as wicked a tyranny as passive obedience or the Vatican decrees of 1870, since both despotism and revolution have their root in intolerance. "The spurious liberty of the United States is twice cursed," and the Italian *risorgimento* has "a foul preëminence in modern history." Another product of the revolution is the modern theory of nationality, which he pronounced to be "inconsistent both with political reason and with Christianity"—a view, by the way, difficult to reconcile with his condemnation, based on the sanctity of state rights, of the vic-

torious party in the great American struggle. However that may be, federation seemed to Acton one of the surest guarantees of liberty—so much so that he regarded Austria as the nearest approach to the ideal state. England, one gathers, would be even nearer; but in England the revolution has left its stain of Protestant intolerance, and no state can be perfect of which the institutions are hostile to the spirit of Catholicism. For it is the assumed essential connection between liberty and Catholicism that is the real heart of Acton's position. His reading of modern history is that democracy, the assassin of liberty, springs from the quarrel between church and state: the Protestant reformers inaugurated a great movement for the repression of conscience; they put back the cause of liberty and favored despotism and revolution, of which the Catholic Church, with its doctrine of "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," is the irreconcilable enemy. The church is all things to all nations, whereas heresy is national and local. Nor is there any real incongruity between the Pope's supreme authority and the progress of modern society. The church applies to science and literature its "system of economy and accommodation"—a system which he admits, however, that she has not extended to philosophers. And if she has persecuted, it has not been, like the Protestants, from any inherent principle of intolerance, but partly *per accidens* and partly to save society. The outcome of his argument is that persecution (*e. g.*, of the Albigenses) was right in the Middle Ages, but became wrong about the time of the Reformation.

What is remarkable in these generalizations is not so much their inconsistencies as their air of unreality. They are the work of a man with a passion for truth, indeed, but a one-sided passion. As regards the sifting of documents and the fixing of details, that passion had free play; but when it came to philosophizing, it produced results strangely *en l'air* for a man of such vast learning and cosmopolitan connections. How abstract and verbal his speculation could become may be seen from his treatment of Ethics. One belief underlies all his historical judgments—the belief in an immutable moral law, always supreme for conscience, in virtue of which alone crime is crime and virtue is virtue, both for states and individuals. The Catholic Church is the embodiment of this morality, which is the same at all times and under all circumstances. What precisely he means by asserting this is not plain; but it is plain that there is one particular

view which he means to deny. He denies (and apparently he regards this denial as equivalent to the assertion of the supremacy of moral law) that the consequences of actions are to any extent relevant to the question whether actions are right or wrong. When he says that the end never justifies the means, and that "mesology is moral skepticism," he rejects all systems of Ethics which make the rightness of action dependent partly on their results. But this is an extreme theoretical position, to which it is hard to conform in practice. Nor did Acton conform. For instance, he says that the Almighty has sometimes "poured down blessings" even through slavery; and he held, as we have seen, that the safety of society may sometimes justify persecution. However, he seems after all to have had but a confused idea of the meaning of "mesology" in Ethics; otherwise he would scarcely have put, as he did, the Carlylean "might is right" and the "Weltgeschichte ist Weltgericht" of the Prussian historians in the same pillory with the theory that right actions are those which promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

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ÉTUDES DE MORALE POSITIVE. Par Gustave Belot, Professeur de Philosophie au Lycée Louis-le-Grand. Paris, 1907. Pp. vii, 523.

Writers on Ethics seem to be peculiarly exposed, perhaps because of the very familiarity of the subject-matter, to those errors which spring from treating as identical several different things that happen to be called by similar names. Apparently M. Belot is blind to this danger; at any rate he has not taken proper precautions against it, and his work suffers accordingly.

At the outset his whole conception of positive morality depends largely on a current confusion of speech. Positive morality is the name of the doctrine which he advocates in opposition both to the metaphysicians, who would base morality on some *a priori* theoretical principle, and to the sociologists, whose mechanical theory of society would (he thinks) destroy morality altogether. But what does the name imply? The French word *moralité* is ambiguous—even more so than the English word "morality." It can mean either "morality" in the sense of good conduct, or "ethics" in the sense of a theory about good conduct. Now, M.